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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [GT](#) [VE](#) [UNSC](#)
SUBJECT: FRANCE ON GUATEMALA/VENEZUELA FOR UNSC SEAT

REF: STATE 37915

Classified By: DCM Karl Hofmann for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA A/S-equivalent for IO affairs Sylvie Bermann indicated March 10 that the GOF had not yet formulated a position on the contest between Venezuela and Guatemala for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. While the MFA favors Guatemala, Bermann made clear that the final decision would be taken by the Presidency, where President Chirac's personal relationship with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez was certain to be a factor. On lobbying others, in particular with African countries, she said that this, too, would ultimately depend on the Presidency, given Chirac's personal ties to a number of African leaders. More generally, she reasoned that the intention of another Central American country (Costa Rica) to run for a seat in 2008 could hurt Guatemala's chances, as could Chinese objections to Guatemalan recognition of Taiwan. On lobbying others, Bermann ascribed to China significant influence in Africa and Asia and cautioned against too much U.S. identification with Guatemala's candidacy. The Ambassador is seeking a meeting at the Presidency to pursue this matter. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) PolMinCouns and Deputy met March 10 with IO A/S-equivalent Sylvie Bermann and desk officer Nicolas Kassianides to present reftel points on supporting Guatemala's, and defeating Venezuela's, UNSC non-permanent seat candidacies. Separately, poloff raised the issue March 9 with MFA UN/Middle East Cabinet advisor Christophe Guilhou.

Waiting for Chirac

¶3. (C) In response to the presentation of reftel points by PolMinCouns, Bermann noted that she had discussed the issue previously with IO A/S Silberberg and in Moscow among the P-5. Bermann was frank in telling PolMinCouns that the official French position on Venezuela vs. Guatemala had not yet been formulated. She personally, and she was confident the MFA generally, favored supporting Guatemala. However, the final decision would ultimately be the Presidency's -- and specifically President Chirac's, given his close relationship with Venezuelan President Chavez. She said the MFA would attempt to persuade him to support Guatemala, but such an outcome was not assured. She indicated that there might also be possibilities for reaching a common position in the EU, although she did not elaborate further.

¶4. (C) PolMinCouns asked whether, in the event of a decision in favor of Guatemala, France would be willing to lobby other countries, particularly in Africa. Bermann again responded that this would be largely up to President Chirac, given his personal ties to African leaders.

Costa Rica a complicating factor

¶15. (C) Complicating the matter further, she continued, were Costa Rica's plans to campaign for a non-permanent seat for ¶2008. This would result in two successive Central American candidacies, which could also hurt Guatemala's chances. She suggested rejiggering the rotation, for instance by having Costa Rica make clear that it would be prepared to postpone its candidacy by one year in the event Guatemala were selected.

China a potential spoiler

¶16. (C) Repeating concerns expressed earlier by Guilhou, Bermann suggested that China might be a problem, given Guatemala's recognition of Taiwan and its history of promoting Taiwanese UN membership. When PolMinCouns enumerated a list of countries that had held non-permanent seats despite their support for Taiwan, Bermann countered that, based on her research, each of those countries had been the sole candidate from its region (Latin America or Africa). PolMinCouns asked Bermann whether she believed China's interest in an effective UNSC might ultimately outweigh its concerns over the issue of recognition of Taiwan. Bermann countered that, unfortunately, she believed China and Venezuela might yet discover a common interest in constraining UNSC action on Iran.

Cautioning the U.S.

¶17. (C) Bermann noted that China had influence in Africa and Asia and was capable of influencing votes. She advised the U.S. against lobbying other Central and South American countries too "brutally" on behalf of Guatemala, judging that this could be counterproductive. PolMinCouns assured her that the U.S. was conscious of this potential dynamic and did not want Guatemala to be perceived as "the U.S. candidate," for which reason we were proceeding discreetly. Bermann responded that countries in the region had nonetheless informed the GOF of U.S. efforts.

Follow-up

¶18. (C) Bermann concluded by undertaking to inform the presidency of the importance the U.S. attached to the issue, in the event that the U.S. wished to pursue the issue further. The Ambassador is seeking a meeting at the Elysee with presidential diplomatic advisor Maurice Gordault-Montagne toward that end.

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Stapleton